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SUBJECT: ESTABLISHMENT OF DRUG INTERDICTION TASK FORCE UNITS

REFS: A. 3/10/04 email Gatz/Moeling; B. Hanoi 920

1. (U) This is an action request -- see para 8.

2. (U) SUMMARY. A key element of a UN-led, U.S.-funded anti-drug project setting up drug interdiction task force units in six Vietnamese provinces bordering China, Cambodia, and Laos is underway. The three-year project focuses on generating interagency agreement to create six "joint interdiction task force units" and provide training and equipment for task force officers to strengthen their law enforcement capacity. This project has high-level support in Vietnam and will make a direct impact on Vietnam's overall counterdrug capacity. END SUMMARY.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND  
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3. (U) The project, titled "Interdiction and Seizure Capacity Building with Special Emphasis on ATS and Precursors," began with a launching ceremony on May 25 in Hanoi. (United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Resident Representative Dr. Doris Buddenberg and Vietnamese Vice Minister of Public Security Lieutenant General Le The Tien had signed the project document in December 2003.) According to Colonel Vu Hung Vuong, Director of the Counternarcotics Department (C-17) of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), the UNODC project is to run for three years with funding of USD 736,800. (Note: so far the U.S. has provided USD 500,000. End note) The top goals of the project are to strengthen drug law enforcement capacity by establishing six interdiction task force units at the provincial level, then move towards reducing the availability of illicit drugs in domestic and overseas markets, Colonel Vuong said. The project sites will be in "hotspot" border provinces -- Lang Son, Lao Cai, Son La, Thanh Hoa, Long An, and An Giang, Colonel Vuong confirmed.

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ESTABLISHMENT OF TASK FORCE UNITS  
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4. (U) According to Colonel Vuong, the implementing agencies include: the MPS' C-17; the Anti-smuggling Department of the General Department of Customs; and the Surveillance Department of the Vietnam Border Army. Each task force unit has ten officers, who started work on June 1, the Colonel said. Out of that number, six will be from the police, two from Customs, and two from the Border Army. The police, however, will take the lead in running the program and will keep these units working after the project ends, Colonel Vuong promised. Colonel Vuong said separately that Vietnam and UNODC chose these six provinces because they are areas where drug trafficking has escalated and where there is a high flow of ATS trafficked across the border.

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2004 CHECKLIST  
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5. (U) Following the establishment of the inter-agency task force units, there will be training for the units on advanced professional investigative techniques, gathering and sharing of intelligence, international cooperation, reporting measures, and testing methods, confirmed Troels Vester of UNODC in a June 1 meeting with emboffs. Vehicles and equipment will also be provided, Colonel Vuong said at the launching ceremony. In addition to the assistance for the task force units, UNODC will also provide equipment to three drug-testing laboratories in Hanoi, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City. During the launching ceremony, Colonel Vuong provided a 15-item checklist for the joint task force units' first year, including:

- Employment of a national technical officer and an administrative assistant for the national project office;
- Establishment of the project office and the steering board;
- Equipment needs assessment;
- Seminar on the establishment of six task force units, procedures and policy for the implementing agencies;
- Building of a mechanism to give instructions by C-17,

Anti-smuggling Department, and the Surveillance Department;  
-- Setting up a reporting system for the units;  
-- Seminar on procedures/cooperation mechanism between the units and the drug testing laboratories;  
-- Building up contact and coordination between the units and the drug testing laboratories;  
-- Procurement of equipment for the units;  
-- Training on the use of equipment;  
-- Training and equipment needs assessment for the testing laboratories;  
-- Procurement of equipment for the laboratories;  
-- Training on the use of equipment;  
-- Setting up an information gathering system for the units; and,  
-- Preparation of training materials.

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INTERAGENCY COOPERATION  
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16. (U) According to UNODC's Vester, the launching ceremony for the project was followed by a two-day internal seminar in which the Border Army, the General Department of Customs, and the Counternarcotics Police hashed out the jurisdictional and operational issues surrounding the new task force units. Vester, the only non-GVN participant in the seminar, called the exchanges "frank and productive" and said that they resulted in a signed "cooperation plan" providing for a detailed implementation framework for the interdiction units to operate. This includes: information and intelligence sharing; coordination of operations and designation of leadership; investigation and handling of specific cases; and conflict resolution.

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U.S. CONTRIBUTION  
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17. (U) As previewed in ref A, in addition to the USD 500,000 that the USG has already committed to this project, UNODC Hanoi is anxious for a commitment of the additional USD 236,000 to allow planning for activities beyond March 2005, when the current funding would run out. Embassy also hopes to improve the project's quality by taking advantage of JIATF-WEST's stated intention to support the deployment of JIATF or DEA trainers to Vietnam in November 2004 and February 2005 to meet the Interdiction Task Force Units' training needs (ref B).

18. (U) ACTION REQUEST: Please advise on the status of the remaining USD 236,000 identified for UNODC Hanoi project AD/VIE/03/G55.

19. (U) Comment: Given Vietnam's proximity to the Golden Triangle and its long land border and coastline, the establishment of the task force units promises a more effective law enforcement effort, especially in border areas. Currently, there are only about 50 poorly equipped drug law enforcement officers in the Border Army and Sea Police forces, who are responsible for the 8,000-kilometer land border and 1 million square kilometers of territorial waters. Thus, the task force units represent a major augmentation of Vietnam's drug enforcement capacity. The high-level seminar with its tangible results is an exceptional outcome of a U.S. assistance project, and the establishment of the joint task forces represents a concrete accomplishment beyond the usual training and exchange activities the U.S. has funded in the past. Embassy strongly supports continued funding of this initiative.  
BURGHARDT